

Newton A. Mitchell House
(Louis Oge House)
209 Washington Street
San Antonio
Bexar County
Texas

HABS No. TX-3171

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

NEWTON A. MITCHELL HOUSE
(Louis Oge House)

HABS No. TX-3171

Location: 209 Washington Street, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas.

Owner: Marshall T. Steves.

Present Occupant: -Tenants.

Present Use: Apartments.

Significance: The house in its original state was a good example of pre-Civil War Classical Revival residential architecture in the San Antonio area. With its later neo-classical additions it is representative of those structures that were up-dated in the latter part of the nineteenth century by contemporary decorative additions. This house is very significant, for it is one of the few buildings of its type dating before the Civil War that is to be found in San Antonio.

Although little is known of Mitchell, the original owner, the building's historical significance is due to its later owner, Louis Oge, who was an early Texas Ranger, Indian fighter, U.S. mail contractor, rancher, and later a prominent San Antonio businessman.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Circa 1859-60.
2. Architect: Not known. Alfred Giles is credited with the additions of circa 1882.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The following is the incomplete chronology of the Mitchell house ownership. See also History section for more information.

1853 Catherine Elder (later Mitchell) purchased land from her brother-in-law Thomas Devine. This land is the site of the present house which was built ca. 1859-60.

1857 Newton Mitchell inherited land from Catherine Elder following their marriage.

1868 Following the Mitchells' deaths, Malvina A. Nelson, sister of Catherine Mitchell, sold the house to Eudora S. Abrahams for \$5,600.

1870 Eudora S. Abrahams sold the house to Catherine Sampson for \$3,300.

1881 Catherine Sampson sold the house to Louis Oge for \$7,000. Ownership of the house remained in the Oge family until recent years.

?-to present Marshall Steves.
(1968)

4. Original plans and construction: The original house is said to have been only one-story high with a basement. This fact is based on an examination of the 1873 "Bird's Eye View . . ." by Augustas Koch. The house is depicted as a one-story structure, apparently with either a flat roof or one with a very low pitch and a low parapet. In the drawing this house and the one adjacent on the south, the Gustave Bliersch house, are similar. The Bliersch house, erected ca. 1859-1860, is largely unchanged today.

At some point the second story was added to the house. The obvious date to be associated with this enlargement is ca. 1882, - at which time the house was altered for Oge by Alfred Giles. However, Catherine Sampson may have caused the second story to be added. Between 1870 when she paid \$3,300 for the property and 1881 when she sold it to Oge for \$7,000, the value had doubled in ten years. In that other property in the area with large two-story houses was valued at six and seven thousand dollars, this gives some weight to the assumption.

In any event, Alfred Giles listed the Louis Oge residence as one of his commissions, which undoubtedly consisted of remodeling rather than extensive building. Oge did add the additions on the rear, a carriage house and new interiors.

B. Historical Context:

Newton A. Mitchell, a native of Tennessee born in 1829, was in San Antonio as early as 1855. At that time he was a practicing attorney in partnership with David Campbell Van Derlip, a prominent San Antonio attorney. Van Derlip died in 1856; after that Mitchell was a partner in the firm of Green and Mitchell, Attorneys at Law, with Nathaniel O. Green, another prominent attorney and politician.

On February 12, 1857, Mitchell married Caroline Catherine Elder, the daughter of Thomas G. Elder. According to F. C. Chabot in his 1937 book, With the Makers of San Antonio, the Elders were descended from a prominent Catholic family of Kentucky, and Thomas Elder was one of the early planters in the La Grange vicinity ca. 1837. Catherine Elder's sister, Helen, married Thomas J. Devine in 1844 in La Grange, and in about 1845 the Devines and the Elders left La Grange and made their home in San Antonio.

Chabot seems to be slightly in error in regard to the date of Devine's removal to San Antonio, however, as the Bexar County deed records show him to be a resident of Bexar County in 1843. It was, in fact, in that year that Devine purchased what was then known as the lower labor of the old mission Valero from John McMullen for \$600. This tract of land, once the lower irrigated fields of the Mission, was bounded on the north by the lands of Juliana Vasque (?), on the south by property of Pedro Huessar, on the east by the Acequia Madre, and on the west by the San Antonio River. This property corresponds to what is known today as the King William area. From subsequent deed records it appears that this tract of land was used by Devine for farming or pasturage purposes. The area was provided with several irrigation ditches extending westward from the Acaquia Madre, and apparently at least one corresponded to the line of the present east-to-west streets in the area.

In 1853 Devine sold the upper section of this tract to Catherine Elder for \$1600. It was described as "being the two upper Tables of Irrigable Land in the tract formerly owned by John McMullen" and purchased from him by Devine and further, as ". . . Commencing on the Main Alamo Ditch . . . (thence) to the San Antonio River . . . (thence) down said River to the southwest corner on the 2'nd Table of Irrigable Land, thence with the dividing line or ditch between the 2'nd and 3'rd Tables or Suertes of Land . . . 16 acres more or less with the buildings and improvements on the same, saving and excepting the lot of ground 60 varas (199.80 feet) on the head of the 2'nd Table or Suerte. . . 16 July 1853. . . ." This property appears to be the present city blocks designated NCB 896, 739, 740 and 741 respectively. This area is slightly larger than 16 acres; but when the 60-vara area reserved by Devine is taken into account, the remainder very closely approximates the 16 acres.

There is no further information regarding the "buildings and improvements" mentioned in the transaction, and it may be that the present Mitchell house was in existence at the time. However, it is more probable that the buildings referred to were unpretentious vernacular houses rather than a structure of the size of the Mitchell house. Chabot states that Devine's "first home was a small adobe house on the Concepcion ditch," undoubtedly located on the 60-vara area reserved by Devine; this is probably an accurate description of whatever buildings were located on the tract purchased by Catherine Elder.

Catherine Elder married Newton A. Mitchell on February 12, 1857, at which time Mitchell inherited her property.

In May of 1859, Mitchell engaged the City Surveyor, Gustave Friesleben, to survey this property and lay out streets, blocks and lots for what was to be known as N. A. Mitchell's Subdivision. Friesleben's plat, titled "Plat of Townlots in lower San Antonio surveyed for Newton A. Mitchell by G. Friesleben in May 1859" is mentioned in numerous deed records covering property transactions in the area, but it is missing from the City Surveyor's records where it was said to have been on

file. The first lots sold by Mitchell were located on Washington Street south of and adjoining his residence and were conveyed on May 6, 1859, the same date of the subdivision survey.

Catherine Mitchell died between January 29, 1861, and June 26, 1862, and Newton Mitchell died January 3, 1864. They had no children and N. A. Mitchell left no surviving heirs. Following his wife's death, Mitchell relinquished his rights to the remaining unsold property in the tract inherited from her conveying the same to her immediate surviving heirs: Mrs. Helen Devine, Mrs. Malvina A. Nelson, her sisters; and Robert, Felix, and Albert Elder, her brothers.

Mitchell left no will, no wife, relatives, or survivors; so on April 1, 1864, Nathaniel O. Green, his law partner, petitioned the Bexar County Probate Court for letters to administer the estate. Green was subsequently appointed to this position which he held until 1865. On October 30, 1865, Felix G. Elder then petitioned the courts to be appointed administrator of the estate as Green had "abandoned the state."

Malvina A. Nelson petitioned for the position the following year and secured the appointment. On October 23, 1866, she filed the first - inventory of the estate which consisted of two properties: "One house and lot form only the residence of deceased (Mitchell) in the city of San Antonio on the east side of the River and opposite the former residence of F. Guilbeau. Valued at in Cash \$4,000."

The second property was 640 acres of land, southwest of San Antonio, "being the head right survey of Thomas G. Elder set apart by commissioner in partition to N. A. Mitchell as his portion of his wife's estate. Valued at in cash \$320."

Due to the depressed economy following the close of the Civil War, Malvina Nelson petitioned the court for permission to rent Mitchell's house by "private contract" rather than sell it. She reported on February 6, 1867, that the house was then being repaired and would be ready to rent in a few days.

In her Annual Statement of Finance of the Estate filed July 31, 1868, the following repair bills were enumerated:

March 1, 1867 - For Repairs on House	\$17.00
March 25, 1867 - Mason & Plasterer's bill	50.00
March 25, 1867 - Carpenter's bill	65.12
March 23, 1867 - Painter's bill	58.00
March 22, 1867 - Plaster's bill	37.00
March 25, 1867 - Repair fence	20.00

The Mitchell homestead was not disposed of until 1868, at which time it was sold to Eudora S. Abrahams for \$5,600. She then sold the property to Catherine Sampson on June 1, 1870, for \$3,300.

On August 29, 1881, Catherine Sampson sold the house and lot to Louis Oge for \$7,000. Oge, a native of Alsace-Lorraine, immigrated as young boy with the Henri Castro colony in 1845. At the age of eighteen he joined the Texas Rangers under Big Foot Wallace and saw duty on the wild Texas frontier, after which he was employed as a mail coach guard on the San Antonio - El Paso stage route. Oge later served as a Government mail carrier in New Mexico and Arizona, and as a conductor for the Butterfield and Company Stage Line in Arizona.

Returning to Texas in 1860, Oge procured a cattle ranch in West Texas, and over the ensuing twenty years he amassed a "modest fortune." Giving up his ranch in 1881, Oge purchased the old Mitchell house and moved to San Antonio. There he spent his later years engaged in various business speculations and civic responsibilities. He was at one time elected Alderman and at another as president of the local school board. The house remained in the Oge family until recent years, and it is now used as an apartment house.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The principal interest lies in the imposing proportions of the facade and its mixture of various styles of Classic Revival details.
2. Condition of fabric: Fair. The front porch needs leveling. The porte cochere at the rear is badly deteriorated. The main portion of the house needs a great deal of painting, cleaning and minor maintenance.

B. Description of Interior:

1. Overall dimensions: The house measures approximately 50' x 89', and is two stories high plus a basement. The number of bays across the front facade is five. The main portion of the house is almost square, and there is a wing at the center of the rear wall.
2. Foundation: Stone basement and foundation walls at main portion of the house; stone foundations at rear wing and frame foundation walls there.
3. Walls: The main portion of the house has masonry walls. Stone could be discerned at a few points, and it was the local yellowish limestone. Lime mortar is used on these walls. On the exterior, the walls have been covered with cement plaster which has been scored to imitate large blocks of stone and painted white. Because of the way in which the plaster laps the window frames at the north and south sides of the house, it would appear that the stucco was applied after the original construction.

4. Structural system, framing: The main portion of the house is stone, load-bearing masonry; first and second floors and roof construction are wood frame. The rear wing is wood frame.
5. Porches: A double, five-bay gallery extends across the front supported by two sets of boxed wood piers of square shape having simple classical molded wood plinths and capitals. It is enclosed by a wood balustrade with turned balusters, a plain lower rail and a simple molded upper rail. A wood entablature, consisting of three shallow fascia, blank frieze, and dentilated cornice of Ionic order, spans the lower set of porch piers, while the upper entablature, approximating the lower, is of metal. A central pediment crowns the porch.

A broad set of wood steps with a balustrade is centered on the central bay and provides access from the sidewalk to the porch on the first level. It has stringers resting on concrete supports at the grade level.

The porte cochere at the rear is of wood construction, has similar piers and is sheltered by a flat roof.

6. Chimneys: Three yellow brick chimneys with corbeled caps are on the either end elevation (north or south elevation).
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The front entrance is centrally located on the east facade and is a Venetian or Palladian style doorway. The doorway is flanked by engaged classical columns on pedestals, all wood with typical classical moldings. The door frame is wood and the opening is filled by a pair of wood doors, each with a lower molded wood panel and a large light above which is glazed with hexagonal panes set in lead comes. The semicircular fanlight above the doorway is framed with wood and filled by beveled plate glass set in wood muntins.

The doorway on the second story which opens onto the upper gallery is a repeat of the entrance below, but is smaller in size and is flanked by glass panels with hexagonal panes. It differs, also, by being flanked with slightly smaller double doors glazed in the same manner as those below.

Other exterior doors are of common panel types.
 - b. Windows: Most of the window frames on the first and second floors on the front east facade are of wood in the characteristic late Greek Revival style with corsets or ancons at the upper corners. The rest of the frames are lapped over by a one-inch thick projection of stucco. The first floor wood sash are triple hung, 6/6/6 lights. Second floor windows are wood

double hung sash, 6/6 lights, except for two sash at the rear elevation, which match the hexagonal-paned windows on the front elevation, and are double hung. The basement windows on the south elevation are inward opening casements; the rest of the basement windows are double hung, as are those of the rear wing, some 6/6 and others 1/1.

8. Roof: The roof is hipped with a flat central dock and is metal covered, standing-seam type. Rear wings have flat roofs of modern asphalt and gravel. A large pediment intersects the main roof on the front facade. The tympanum has a horizontal unit of three square framed openings, the central one being filled with horizontal louvers, and those flanking are single light windows. A small triangle of molded stucco in pattern is just above the windows. The remainder of the tympanum surface is finished in stucco embellished with a concentric interlocking circle design. A wood mounding-gutter follows the eaves. The rafters do not project.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The present floor plan has been subdivided in recent years for the purpose of creating apartments in the house and the original floor plan is difficult to determine. It appears, however, that the plan was the central-hall type, characteristic of the Greek Revival style. The plan was divided into three sections of equal widths by the masonry partition walls defining the central hallway. This is an unusual feature, as stair halls were usually of narrower width than the rooms flanking them. Two rooms flank this wide hall on either side and open onto it by doorways. The additions on the rear, centered on the plan, are presently inaccessible. The upper floor seems to have been a repeat of the lower. The basement reflects the hall space, but the flanking spaces are undivided.
2. Stairways: The principal stairway dates from the ca. 1882 remodeling and is located in the right-hand wall of the central hall. At its beginning it is a quarter-turn type with a landing, then at the upper end a dog-leg type with a wide intermediate landing. Newels are square in section and are heavy. The stairway has Romanesque foliate patterns and flutes, turned balusters, a molded hand rail and a decorative patterned stinger. It is imitation-oak-grained.

A second stairway, located on the outside wall of the stairhall at the far end, is a quarter-turn with a landing ending as a half-turn with landings. It is of wood and is similar to the principal stairway.

3. **Flooring:** Softwood tongue-and-groove flooring on the first and second floors are covered in some areas with resilient flooring of recent manufacture. At the basement, the floor is of tiles of red, black, two shades of grey, beige and cream colors - all set in a Victorian pattern with a border.
4. **Wall and ceiling finish:** Plaster.
5. **Doors:** These are softwood, painted to imitate yellow oak color and grain. The designs of doors and frames vary. On the first floor the doors are four-paneled, the bottom two panels square, the upper two tall rectangles. On the second floor the doors are six-paneled. The second floor door frames are more elaborate.
6. **Hardware:** Some bronze or brass hardware survives. It has patterned designs of Victorian character.
7. **Mechanical equipment:**
 - a. **Heating:** Original fireplaces have been blocked up. Natural gas jets provided in recent years are for the unvented space heaters.
 - b. **Lighting:** Modern electric fixtures.

D. **Site:**

1. **General setting and orientation:** The front of the building faces east across a deep lawn to the street. The west boundary of the large lot is the San Antonio River, and the San Antonio Depot, Arsenal site is just on the other side of the river. One block to the east, paralleling Washington Street, is King William Street, along which are still many large homes once inhabited by the wealthy people of the city. In the general area houses are used as cheap, substandard apartment houses (as is the case with the Mitchell House) and as homes of private families, in some cases of people who are quite respectable and who are aware of the historic value of their homes. The center of San Antonio lies a mere mile and a quarter to the north.
2. **Outbuilding:** There was a coachhouse in the rear yard, southwest of the house. It was moved to a new site at 257 Yellowstone Street, San Antonio. It measures 20'-2" x 38" and is two-stories high. It is covered with vertical siding and has a flat roof with decorative curved eaves. There is a hay doorway on the top floor. It was built during the Oge family ownership of the Mitchell house.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

City Surveyor's Record Book 1, p. 396, 4/183-185.

Deed records. Bexar County Courthouse, San Antonio, Texas.

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2. Secondary and published sources:

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Project Supervisor
Historic American Buildings Survey
1968, 1969

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The San Antonio project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in the summer of 1968, and was made possible with funds from HABS and two sponsors, the Bexar County Historical Survey Committee and the San Antonio Conservation Society. Under the direction of James Massey, Chief of HABS, the project was carried out by Wesley I. Shank (Iowa State University), project supervisor, and by student assistant architects, Charles W. Barrow (University of Texas); Les Beilinson (University of Miami); William H. Edwards (University of Illinois); and Larry D. Hermesen (Iowa State University) at the HABS field office in the former Ursuline Academy buildings, San Antonio. John C. Garner, Jr., Director of Bexar County Architecture Survey, did the outside work on the written documentaires. Susan McCown, a HABS staff historian in the Washington, D.C. office, edited the written data in 1983, for preparation of transmittal to the Library of Congress. Dewey G. Mears of Austin, Texas took the documentary photographs of the San Antonio structures.